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CRESCAS ON THE PROBLEM OF DIVINE ATTRIBUTES

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PREFATORY NOTE.

IT has been well said that in Arabic, and for that matter also in Jewish philosophy, the problem of Universals had never acquired, as it did later on in Scholasticism, the importance of an independent subject of inquiry. Still, the problem was not altogether unknown. Always latent, it occasionally cropped out in various philosophical discussions. We need only slightly penetrate below the surface of some controversies of the time in Metaphysics and Psychology to discover the lurking presence of the problem of Universals. For the true problem of Universals began with the rejection of Platonic Realism. Admitting with the Aristotelians that genera and species are mere products of the mind, the question was then raised as to what was the nature of those intellectual conceptions and their relation to the individual beings. It was this field of inquiry that proved a fertile ground for the crop of the many subtle and hardly distinguishable mediaeval theories of Universals. Now the same problem must inevitably appear whenever the mind perceives a distinction of a purely intellectual character in an object, and the solution of that problem will of necessity prove more difficult when, in addition to defining the nature of that intellectual distinction, we must at the same time safeguard

the unity of the object. Thus, for instance, in the case of the soul, one and homogeneous, we may ask what is the relation between the essence and its faculties. And in the case of God, too, the absolutely simple, how are His attributes related to His essence?

It is as a problem of Universals in disguise that the problem of Attributes will be herein presented. I shall therefore forego the discussion of the lexicographical and exegetical aspect of the problem, namely, the enumeration of all the Attributes found in the Bible, and their explanation by Jewish philosophers, the object of this paper being to discuss the general principles underlying the problem and its solution. As part of a larger work upon the philosophy of Crescas, it deals more fully with that author. The two chapters devoted to him are intended both to present a constructive view of his theory and to serve as a commentary on his text. They are preceded by a chapter devoted to a general treatment of certain representative authors advisedly selected for their value as an introduction to the study of Crescas.

CHAPTER I

AN ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM AND SOME REPRESENTATIVE SOLUTIONS.

I.

THERE are four initial assumptions underlying the problem of divine attributes in mediaeval philosophy. The starting-point of the problem is the rationalistic attempt to invest the Scriptural predications of God with the validity of logical judgements. Then, a logical judgement is defined, after Aristotle, as having a double content, synthesizing as it does two distinct terms, of which one must be a universal,

by bringing them together by one of the several relations obtaining between subject and predicate. In addition to these two assumptions, while Platonic Realism is not an essential prerequisite, the problem of attributes involves an anti-nominalistic conception of Universals. Finally, it follows Avicenna in identifying God with the metaphysical conception of necessary existence, whose simplicity by definition precludes from its being not only actual composition, but likewise any suggestion of noetic plurality and relativity. The question is then raised, How can we form a logical judgement about God without at the same time creating the anomaly of having the unrelatable Necessarily Existent brought into some logical relation with some predicate distinct from Himself? It is this apparent incompatibility of the formal interpretation of Biblical phraseology, the synthetic conception of a logical judgement, the anti-nominalistic view of universals, and the Avicennean definition of necessary existence that lies at the basis of the problem of attributes.

In Maimonides' treatment of Attributes we find a clear if not a formal statement of the problem. He sets out with a rationalistic definition of faith. Faith is not the correlative of reason, but rather the consummation of the reasoning process. Nor is it a mere attitude of mind, an inane state of consciousness; it is the comprehension of some objective reality. Furthermore, faith is not immediate comprehension or intuitive knowledge, the claim of mysticism, but it is resultant knowledge, the positive intellectual certainty arrived at after a process of ratiocinative reasoning. Faith thus being knowledge, derivative and logically demonstrable, the profession of faith must, therefore, have the force of logical judgements. They cannot be mere verbal

utterance, mere irresponsible exclamations indicative but inexpressive of an attitudinal belief; they must be the embodiment of the conclusions of logical syllogisms, in which the premisses, though not stated, are assumed. Consequently the articles of faith, containing asseverations about the nature and being of God, based upon corresponding affirmations taken from the Scriptures, are perforce logical propositions conforming to all the regimens regulating such propositions.¹

But a logical proposition must contain a synthesis of two distinct terms. Identity, contends Maimonides, is not a relation. A proposition in which the subject and predicate indicate one and the same thing is logically meaningless, for to assert that *A* is *A* is a mere tautology.² In this as well as in his subsequent elaborate statement of what he considers as real, logical relations, though at first sight he does not appear to do so, Maimonides is really following in the footprints of his Stagirite master. In order to show

¹ Cf. *Moreh*, I, 50. This identification of Faith with ratiocinative reasoning was common among certain classes of Moslem thinkers, and was not unknown to Jewish philosophers prior to Maimonides (cf. Kaufmann, *Attributenlehre*, p. 369, note 9. To Kaufmann's references may be added Hobot ha-Lebabot, I, 1). It seems to me that this view may be traced directly to Aristotle through Simplicius. In *De Caelo*, book I, chapter ii, Aristotle has the following statement: Διόπερ ἐξ ἀπάντων ἂν τις τούτων συλλογιζόμενος πιστεύσειεν. Upon this Simplicius comments as follows: Ἡ πίστις διττὴ ἐστίν, ἡ μὲν χωρὶς ἀποδείξεως ἀλόγως γινομένη, οἷαν τινὲς ἰσχυοῦσι καὶ ἐπὶ τοῖς ἀποπατάτοις, ἡ δὲ μετὰ ἀπόδειξιν καὶ συλλογισμόν ἀποδεικτικόν, ἥτις καὶ ἀσφαλὴς ἐστὶ καὶ ἀνέλεγκτος καὶ τῇ ἀληθείᾳ τῶν ὄντων συμπεφυκυῖα . . . κάλλιον δέ, οἶμαι, λέγειν, ὅτι ταῖς ἀποδεικτικαῖς ἀνάγκαις προσεῖναι παραινεί πανταχοῦ μὲν, μάλιστα δὲ ἐν τοῖς περὶ τῶν θείων λόγοις τὴν ἀπὸ τῆς πίστεως συμπάθειαν, οὐ μόνον βεβαίωσιν τῆς ἀληθοῦς γνώσεως ἐμποιοῦσαν, ὅταν μετὰ τὴν ἀπόδειξιν ἐπιγένηται, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν πρὸς τὰ γνωστὰ ἔνωσιν, ἥτις ἐστὶ τὸ τέλος τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης μακρότητος (*Simplicii in Aristotelis De Caelo Commentaria*, ed. I. L. Heiberg, Berlin, 1894, p. 55).

² Cf. *Moreh*, I, 51.

this congruity, let us first give a genetic analysis of Aristotle's predicables.

It is from his classification of the Categories that Aristotle derives his predicables, for whatever other purpose that classification might have originally served in Aristotle's system, its function as expressing logical relations between subject and predicate is unquestionable.³ When Aristotle, however, uses the categories in their restrictive application of predicables, instead of their common tenfold classification, he adopts their less current division into two, Substance and Accident.⁴ Thus the predicate of a proposition may be either a Substance or an Accident. Neither of these, however, can be a particular. Two individual substances, denoting one and the same thing, cannot be related as subject and predicate. Likewise a definite accident cannot be predicated of a subject. 'John is John' and 'The table is *this definite red*' are not logical propositions. Conse-

³ Whether the Categories were originally intended by Aristotle as logical or ontological divisions is a moot point (cf. Zeller, *Aristotle*, vol. I, p. 274, note 3; p. 275, note 1; Grote, *Aristotle*, vol. I, ch. iii). No question on this point, however, existed for the Arabic and Jewish philosophers. To them it was clear that the Categories were both logical and metaphysical, and are treated as such in the works of Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Algazali. Likewise in the Scholastic philosophy, the Categories had logical as well as metaphysical significance (cf. De Wulf, *Scholasticism Old and New*, p. 141).

⁴ Averroes, in his paraphrase of Aristotle's Categories (ספר המאמרות), has the following classification: (1) Universal Substance (לכן רש"י), which is predicable of a subject but does not exist in it (העצם הכולל), (2) Particular accident (מקרה נרמז), which exists in a subject but is not predicable of it (הוא בנושא), (3) Universal accident (המקרה הכולל), which both exists in a subject and is predicable of it (ינשא על נושא והוא נ"כ), (4) Particular Substance (איש העצם), which neither exists in a subject nor is predicable thereof (לא ינשא על נושא ואיננו בנושא). Cf. Organon, *The Categories*, ch. ii.

quently, whether substance or accident, the predicables must be universals. Now, a universal substance may denote either the genus or the species of a thing, and a universal accident may be differentiated, with respect to its applicability, as more or less essential to the subject. In this way Aristotle derives his four predicables: genus, species, property, and accident, which, raised to five in Porphyry's 'Introduction' by the addition of 'specific difference', were referred to by mediaeval logicians as the five predicables.⁵

Herein, if I am not mistaken, we may find the origin of Maimonides' fivefold division of the possible relations between subject and attribute. Their difference in nomenclature is more apparent than real, and the process of their derivation from the Categories will be shown to tally with that followed by Aristotle. As already mentioned, Maimonides rejects identity as a logical relation, that is, the attributes cannot be taken as individual, first substances. What is now left is the alternative, that they must be either universal substances or universal accidents. In the words of Maimonides: 'It will now be clear that the attributes must be one of two things; either the essence of the object described—in that case it is a mere explanation of a name, &c.—or the attribute is something different from the object described' (*Moreh*, I, 51). This general twofold classification is now subdivided by Maimonides into five classes. Taking universal substance, from which the Aristotelians get genus, species, and specific difference, Maimonides

⁵ Cf. *Intentions*, Logic. Algazali enumerates these five universals (הכוללים הנפרדים; הנפרדים החמשה) which may be predicated of a subject, namely, סוג, מין, הברל, סגולה, מקרה. Sharastani likewise names the same five predicables: (ed. Cureton, p. 350) الفصل, الخاصة, العرض العام, الجنم, النوع.

divides it with respect to its function rather than with respect to its content, thus obtaining two classes, Definition and Part of Definition, for the combination of genus with species or with specific difference forms a definition, whence any one of these three may be properly called Part of Definition. Then again, taking universal accident, which by Aristotle is roughly subdivided into property and (general) accident, bearing upon the tenfold division of Categories, Maimonides divides it more minutely into three classes. The Categories of quantity and quality yield the relation of *Property*; those of Relation, Space, Time, Situation, and Possession are placed under the heading of *External Relations*, whereas the Categories of Action and Passion are designated by him as *Dynamic Relations*. Applying this theory of logical relations to the interpretation of divine attributes, Maimonides arrives at the following conclusion. The divine attributes cannot be identical with their subject, and, while they must be distinct, their relation to it must be equivalent to that of a Definition, Part of Definition, Property, External Relation or Action.⁶

If in the Biblical predications of God, as it has been shown, the attribute must be distinct from but related to the subject, the question then arises, By which of the five enumerated relations are they conjoined? To answer this question it must first be determined what is the nature of the subject of those attributes, or God, in so far as it is known by the proof for His Existence. Now, so much is known about the nature of God, that He is necessary existence, a term used by Avicenna, and corresponding to the Aristotelian Prime Mover. For just as Aristotle, taking motion as the starting-point of his physical inquiries, ulti-

⁶ Cf. *Moreh*, I, 52.

mately arrived at the inevitable existence of a Prime Immovable Mover, so Avicenna, reflecting upon the nature of necessity and contingency, eventually concluded that there must be something that is Necessary Existence.⁷ Whether Aristotle's Prime Mover should be identified with Avicenna's Necessary Existence is a controversial point which does not concern us now, and will be taken up elsewhere.⁸ It is, however, clear that in his discussion of divine attributes Maimonides starts out with the Avicennean conception of Necessary Existence, the proof for which is incorporated by Maimonides within his various proofs for the existence of God.⁹ Now, in the Avicennean application of the term, necessary or absolute existence means the negation of any cause whatsoever, the final as well as the efficient, the formal as well as the material. Thus the term Necessary Existence, negative in its original meaning with respect to causation, has ultimately acquired by the negation of all causes whatsoever the additional meaning of absolute simplicity and all which that connotes. The Necessarily Existent must, therefore, be absolutely simple, that is, its essence must exclude not only actual plurality, but metaphysical and epistemological plurality as well, being in no less degree impervious to the distinction between matter and form, genus and species, than to actual, physical disintegration and composition. Absolute simplicity, according to Avicenna, excludes the five possible kinds of plurality: (1)

⁷ This will be fully discussed in a chapter on 'The Proofs for the Existence of God'. Cf. *Moreh*, II, 1, Third Argument.

⁸ Cf. *ibid.*

⁹ Cf. *Moreh*, II, 1, Third Philosophical Argument. This Avicennean argument is introduced by Maimonides as follows: 'This is taken from the words of Aristotle, though he gives it in a different form' (cf. Hebrew commentaries).

Actual plurality as that of physical objects ; (2) noetic plurality as that of matter and form ; (3) of subject and attribute ; (4) of genus and species ; and (5) of essence and existence.¹⁰

Absolute simplicity is thus the main fact known about necessary existence. And so, says Maimonides, when the necessarily existent is placed as the subject of a proposition, it cannot be related to its predicate by any of the first four of the five classes of relations enumerated. The reasons for that are variously stated by Maimonides, but it seems to me that they can all be classified under two headings : first, the implication of plurality ; and second, the implication of similarity.¹¹

¹⁰ Cf. *Destruction of the Philosophers*, Disputation V.

¹¹ The classification of Maimonides' arguments into these two divisions is based upon the following facts : In chapters 50 and 51, Maimonides explicitly states that his ground for the rejection of attributes is to be found in the simplicity of the divine substance. In chapter 52, in his enumeration of the five classes of attributes, the first three are rejected for the following reasons : Definition because God has no previous causes (שהוא ית' אין לו סבות קודמות) ; Part of Definition because it would imply that in God essences were compound, and so it could have a definition which has been excluded on account of the implication of previous causation (cf. Afodi's commentary) ; Property because God is not a magnitude, He is not affected by external influences, He is not subject to physical conditions, and He is not an animate being. Now, all these reasons are in fact nothing but modifications of the chief reason, namely, the implication of the composition of the divine essence. They are thus summed up by Maimonides himself : 'Consequently, these three classes of attributes, describing the essence of a thing, or part of the essence, or a quality of it, are clearly inadmissible in reference to God, for they imply composition.' והנה אלו שלשה חלקים מן התארים, והם מה שיורה על מהות, או על איכות אחת נמצאת במהות, כבר התבאר המנעה בחקו יתעלה מפני שהם כלם מורים על הרכבה. The fourth class of attributes, that of external relation, are rejected by Maimonides not because they imply composition in the divine essence, but because a real external relation must not be assumed to exist between God and created beings. Why that must not be assumed, however, is explained

As for the first of these reasons, Maimonides restates Avicenna's conception of absolute simplicity. 'There cannot be any belief in the unity of God except by admitting that He is one simple substance, without any composition or plurality of elements; one from whatever side you view it, and by whatever test you examine it; not divisible into two parts in any way and by any cause, nor capable of any form or plurality either objectively or subjectively' (*Moreh*,

by him later on in chapter 56 on the ground that every relation implies similarity, the latter of which is inadmissible on independent grounds. Thus all the arguments against attributes may be reduced to the two classes I have named. In chapter 55 Maimonides advances the following four arguments against attributes: They imply (1) corporeality, (2) passiveness (הפעלות), (3) non-existence or potentiality (בכח, העדר), (4) similarity (דמיון). Here, too, the first three reasons are all reducible to the single reason that they imply composition. Likewise Crescas, in his restatement of Maimonides' arguments against positive attributes, classifies those arguments in the two parts I have mentioned. He says: 'If his contention were true that attributes must be negated on account of the inadmissibility of *composition* and of *relation or similarity* between God and others.' ומזה שום היה החיוב שהיינו משלילת התארים אמתי, להמנעות ההרכבה ולהמנעות שום יחס ודמיון בינו ובין זולתו (מ"א, כ"ג, פ"א 25 a). Abrabanel, however, reduces Maimonides' arguments to the following threefold classification: (1) on account of God's incorporeality, (2) on account of His eternity, and (3) on account of His unity (cf. commentary on the *Moreh*, I, 51): 'ועיין שעשה הרב כאן באמונת התארים ג' בטולים הא': מצד היות הש"י מסולק מן הגשמות, הב' מצד היותו קדמון, והג' מצד היותו אחד. Kaufmann approves of Abrabanel's classification (cf. *Attributenlehre*, p. 377, note 22).

Abraham Shalom has the following classification: (1) On account of the implication of plurality in God, (2) on account of the limitation of human understanding, and (3) on account of the implication of similarity or relation between God and His creatures (cf. *Neveh Shalom*, XII, i, iii). . . . האחת להיותו ית' מחייב המציאות אינו מורכב מחלקים . . . השנית היא מצדו שהב"ת לא יוכל לתאר הבב"ת באמת, השלישית . . . ואין לו ית' שום יחס ודמיון עם ברייתו. As will be noticed, the second of these three arguments is not found among the formal arguments of Maimonides.

Albo's classification of arguments against positive attributes (cf. *infra*, Chap. III, note 125) is not based upon Maimonides' text.

I, 51). Consequently, predicates taken in the sense of definition, part of definition, and accretion are inadmissible with respect to God. They all imply plurality in some sense or other. That accretive qualities are inadmissible goes without saying, since they imply that the subject is composed of external attributes inherent in or adherent to its substance. The inadmissibility of a definition or its parts is not so obvious. To affirm of God attributes which, like the parts of a definition, are merely descriptive of the substantial essence without implying the composition of the substance with anything unessential, would at first sight seem to be quite appropriate. That too, however, is inadmissible, for while the parts of a definition do not imply the composition of the defined substance with something external thereto, there is still the implication that the substance itself is composed, as it were, of two essences, the particular and the universal. It is here that Maimonides' theory of universals comes into play. For nominalism, it may be inferred, Maimonides had the same abhorrence as for logical verbalism.¹² There is the ring of a genuine

¹² It is generally stated that Arabic as well as Jewish philosophers were all nominalists (cf. Munk's *Mélanges*, p. 327), 'Les Péripatéticiens arabes, comme on le pense bien, devaient tous professer le nominalisme d'une manière absolue, et plusieurs d'entre eux se prononcent à cet égard dans les termes les plus explicites'. Among the last referred to he includes, in note 1, also Maimonides, who in *Moreh*, III, 18 states that 'species have no existence except in our own minds' (שאין חוץ לשכל שום נמצא, אבל המין). Cf. also Kaufmann's *Attributenlehre*, p. 379, note 29, 'Was aber Maimūni's Stellung in dem Streite über die Universalien angeht, so bekennt er sich als Aristoteliker zum strengen Nominalismus und läugnet entschieden deren Realität'. Of course, to say that one is a nominalist does not mean anything unless it is definitely explained how the term nominalism is employed. With regard to Maimonides it must be positively stated that his nominalism did not go further than the rejection of Platonic realism. His statement to the effect that the universals are in

feeling of contempt, characteristic of his rationalistic temper of mind, in his sneers at a *flatus vocis*, at 'things that are only said, existing only in words, not in thought, much less in reality' (*Moreh*, I, 51). Platonic realism, claiming the reality of ideas apart from the world of sense, had been discredited with the advent of Aristotelianism long before the age of Maimonides.¹³ In various works on Logic and Metaphysics the absurdity of such a conception is pointed out without even recording a dissenting opinion. Conceptualism, to be sure, had found adherents among Arabic philosophers, but Maimonides, no less than Avicenna, evidently rejected that view. To him the assertion of ideal without real existence could have no meaning. Subjective reality, if it means anything, could merely mean that the reality affirmed has only a verbal significance. It is undoubtedly with reference to Conceptualism that Maimonides points out the meaninglessness of ideal existence and the incongruity in 'the assertion of some thinkers, that the ideas, i.e. the universals, are neither existent nor non-existent' ¹⁴ (*Moreh*, I, 51). What Maimonides, as a follower of Avicenna and in common with all his contemporaries, conceived of universals is that they have both ideal and real existence. Universals, to be sure, exist in the mind, but the human mind does not *invent* them out of nothing.

mind does not commit him to anything definite. That very same statement had been used by Averroes in quite a different sense. The question is, as we shall see, how much in mind they are, and this can only be determined by analysis of such problems where the existence of universals is involved. From our analysis of Maimonides' theory of Attributes it will be gathered that it can hardly be said of him that he was a nominalist 'd'une manière absolue' or that he declared his adherence 'zum strengen Nominalismus'.

¹³ Cf. Munk's *Mélanges*, p. 327.

¹⁴ Cf. Munk's and Friedländer's notes on this passage; Munk's *Mélanges* pp. 327 and 328, n. 1; Kaufmann, *Attributenlehre*, p. 379, n. 29.

What the mind does is only to *discover* them in the multifarious individuals. For prior to the rise of individual beings the universals exist in the mind of God as independent entities, and they remain as such even when they enter upon plurality in material form, though their presence in the individuals is indiscernible except by mental activity.¹⁵ Consequently even in essential attributes, as those which form a definition, there must necessarily be the implication of plurality in the subject. For the definition is not merely a verbal description of the essence, the latter being in itself one and uniform, but, as said Avicenna, the parts of the definition are the predicates of the thing defined. And so, since genus and specific difference are real in a certain sense, and not mere words, the thing defined by its genus and specific difference must be composite in so far as that genus and specific difference are real. That composition, to be sure, would only be mentally discernible, but still it would be inconsistent with the conception of absolute simplicity.

Let us now assume that the universals predicated of God are neither essential nor accidental qualities, but rather external relations between God and His creatures. This interpretation of attributes though sanctioned by the traditional philosophy of his time¹⁶ is rejected by Maimonides

¹⁵ Cf. Avicenna's *Eš-šefah*, translated by M. Horten under the title of *Die Metaphysik Avicenna's*, Part V, ch. 1; De Boer's *Philosophy in Islam* (Eng. tr.), p. 135; Prantl's *Geschichte der Logik*, vol. II, in his exposition of Alfarabi, pp. 305-6, and in that of Avicenna, pp. 347 and 384, especially note 181; Carra de Vaux, *Avicenne*, pp. 224-5.

¹⁶ In his *Intentions of the Philosophers* (*Metaphysics*, Part III, On the Attributes), Algazali restates Avicenna's interpretation of divine attributes as (1) negations (שְׁלִילָה) and (2) relations (צִרְוִיף). Under relations he includes both what Maimonides calls 'external relations' and what he calls 'actions'. The same view is repeated by him in his *Destruction of the Philosophers*, Disputation V. Among Jewish philosophers, Abraham Ibn

as inadequate. In their ultimate analysis he says all such relations may be shown either to have no meaning at all, or, if they do have any meaning, to imply similarity between God and other beings. Relations are fourfold: temporal, spatial, reciprocative, and comparative. God, being incorporeal, cannot have any temporal or spatial relations. Again, His self-sufficiency and absolute independence precludes the relation of reciprocity, for His creativeness, His knowledge, and His beneficence are absolutely independent of the created, known and beneficiary objects. Finally, a relation of comparison exists only when things compared involved a specific identity, and differ only in individual diversity. White and green on that account are incomparable terms, even though they are identical as to their genus colour. Nor are they related terms; they are rather correlative and antithetical, their diversity being specific. God cannot, therefore, be compared with and related to other beings with respect to any predicate affirmed of Him, since all His predicates are indicative of attributes which are identical with essence, and hence absolute and immutable.¹⁷ Nor can we claim that the attributes are some kind of subjective external relations, for every relation must imply a similarity.¹⁸ If two things are related they are in so far

Daud, in his *Emunah Ramah* (Book II, Principle III), permits the use of relational attributes. In fact Maimonides was the first to distinguish between external relations and actions, and while permitting the latter to proscribe the former. Cf. *infra*, Chap. II.

¹⁷ Cf. *Moreh*, I, 52.

¹⁸ Cf. *ibid.* 'Besides, if any relation existed between them, God would be subject to the accident of relation, and although that would not be an accident to the essence of God, it would still be, to some extent, a kind of accident.' To which Shem-tob adds the following explanation: 'If any relation was affirmed of Him, even though an unreal relation, God would be subject to the accident of relation, that is to say, God would have to

similar, and so if a subjective relation means anything there must also be some meaning to subjective similarity. But there can be no similarity between God and other beings; hence, there cannot be any relation between them. For the preclusion of similarity Maimonides advances no arguments.¹⁹ He refers to it as a well-accepted principle which seems to be exclusively based upon Scriptural inferences.

Of the five logical relations originally postulated by Maimonides there is now only one left, the dynamic, which has not been disqualified as a possible explanation of divine attributes. This is retained by Maimonides. The divine attributes are dynamic relations, that is to say, they are descriptive of the operating process of the activity rather than of the qualification therefor.²⁰ That the assertion of resemble some other creature, even though that relation would not be an accident added to His essence.' ואם יתיחס לו שום יחס אפילו שיהיה בלתי אמתי ישיגהו מקרה היחס, והוא שיהיה דומה לשום נברא אעפ"י שאינו מקרה נוסף עליו. Shem-tob's explanation is probably based upon chapter 56, wherein Maimonides elaborately explains the interdependence of relativism and similarity.

¹⁹ For the negation of similarity Maimonides advances no argument except that of authority. 'Another thing likewise to be denied in reference to God is similarity to any existing being. This has been generally accepted [even by the Mutakallemim, cf. Shem-tob's commentary], and is also mentioned in the books of the Prophets; e. g. "To whom, then, will you liken me?" [Isa. 40. 25].' ומה שראוי בהכרח שירחוק ממנו ג"כ. הדמיו לשום דבר מן הנמצאות, וזה דבר כבר הרגיש בו כל אדם [ואפילו המדברים, שם טוב] וכבר גלה בספרי הנביאים בהרחקת הדמיו ואמר, ואל מי תדמיון אל. Though later on he adds, 'It is necessary to demonstrate by proof that nothing can be predicated of God that implies similarity' (ראוי בהכרח להרחיקו ממנו במופת . . . מה שיביא לדמיון), he does not, however, state the proof for this, except that by inference he maintains that similarity must imply a real and not only an external relation. Cf. Ḥobot ha-Lebabot, I, 7 והששי.

²⁰ Cf. *Moreh*, I, 52. 'I do not mean by *its actions* the inherent capacity for a certain work, as is expressed in *carpenter, painter, or smith*, for these

activities implies no plurality in the subject is apparent, for activities denote some external relation of the subject to its environment. In point of fact, most of the Arabic as well as Jewish philosophers do not treat activities as a special logical relation; but, including them together with space and time under the heading of External Relation, admit them all as divine attributes.²¹ The separation of activities as a distinct class of logical relations is effected here by Maimonides because of his rejection of non-dynamic external relations on account of their implication of similarity. It might be questioned, indeed, Why should not activities, too, be excluded on account of similarity? As we shall see later on, this difficulty has not been allowed to pass unchallenged by Crescas.²² For our present purpose, it suffices to state that dynamic relations, according to Maimonides, imply no plurality in the subject, and consequently the divine attributes must be interpreted as designations of activities.

There are, however, two points with regard to dynamic attributes which need some further explanation. First, while it is true that the assertion of any action in itself does not necessarily imply the existence of an accidental quality in the subject, the assertion of many diverse actions, it would seem, must of necessity be accounted for by some kind of diversity in its source, the subject. Second, while some of the Scriptural attributes, as knowledge, can be easily turned into actions, there are others, as life, which do not appear to have any active implication whatsoever. As to

belong to the class of qualities which have been mentioned above; but I mean the action the latter has performed. We speak, e. g. of Zaid, who made this door, built that wall, wove that garment.'

²¹ Cf. *supra*, note 16.

²² Cf. *infra*, Chap. II.

the first, Maimonides maintains that the various activities affirmed of God are in reality emanating as a single act from the divine essence, its manifold ramification being only apparent.²³ As a single ray of light emanating from a luminous object, by striking through a lens breaks into many rays, so the single act of God becomes diversified by striking the lower strata of reality. One in essence, its manifoldness is due merely to the various aspects in which the divine action appears to the human eyes. As for the second point, Maimonides shows inductively how all the Biblical predications have active implications.²⁴ To do that, however, there was no need for him to go through the entire list of attributes found in the Bible. Most of them had been admitted by the Attributists themselves to be actions;²⁵ some of them were a matter of controversy. There were only four, which, unable to interpret as actions, the Attributists considered as essential attributes. These four—life, knowledge, will, power—are shown by Maimonides, in their ultimate analysis, to be actions, and one single action withal.

While the controversial attributes of life, knowledge, will, and power are interpreted by Maimonides as dynamic relations, the attributes of existence, unity, and eternity are admitted by him to be nothing but static.²⁶ And yet they are not attributes; they are absolutely identical with the divine essence. In created beings, to be sure, Maimonides, following Avicenna and the early Arabic philosophers, declares existence and unity to be adjoined to the essence;

²³ Cf. *Moreh*, I, 53.

²⁴ Cf. *ibid.*

²⁵ Cf. Abrabanel's quotation from Averroes in his commentary on the *Moreh*, I, 53.

²⁶ Cf. *Moreh*, I, 57.

in the case of God, however, they are the essence itself.²⁷ But if you argue that since identity is not a relation, the proposition that 'God is existent' or that 'God is one' would be tautological, the answer is that the predicates in this case, though positive in form, are negative in meaning; that logically 'God is existent' is equivalent to 'God is not absent', and 'God is one' to 'God is not many'. And having once stated this new solution of the problem of attributes, reverting now to those predicates he has previously interpreted as actions, Maimonides declares that even those may be taken as static and interpreted as negations.²⁸

The admissibility of negative attributes, which is at first stated by Maimonides as an incontestable fact, is afterwards subjected to a searching examination.²⁹ In an elaborate discussion, illustrated by concrete examples, he clearly points out the distinction between the knowledge of a determinate and of an indeterminate object. Negative attributes as well as positive ones define and limit the object of knowledge, but they do so in different ways. Positive attributes limit the number of all the possible conjectures about an unknown object by singling out a few which constitute its essence; negative attributes eliminate all those conjectures by showing that neither one nor all of them constitute its essence. The former, therefore, is a characterization of the object; the latter is only a circumscription and individualization thereof. As the divine

²⁷ Cf. *Moreh*, I, 57, and *infra*, Chap. II.

²⁸ This may be deduced from the following passage: 'Consequently God exists without existence. Similarly He lives without life, knows without knowledge, is omnipotent without omnipotence, and is wise without wisdom' (*ibid.*).

²⁹ Cf. *Moreh*, I, 58.

essence is without determinations and is unknowable, negative attributes are permissible, whereas positive ones are proscribed.

In this statement of Maimonides' negative interpretation of attributes I have followed the traditional view. Maimonides, according to this, attaches no significance whatsoever to the positive form of those attributes which are interpreted by him negatively.³⁰ 'God is existent' means 'God is not absent', the positive form of the former proposition being absolutely meaningless. This interpretation of Maimonides, though prevalent and widespread, does not, however, seem to me quite correct. I think he attributes some logical significance to the positive form of judgements about God as well as to their negative contents. Let us just briefly restate the problem which Maimonides was called upon to solve. His main problem was not whether God possesses any essential attributes. That assumption was ruled out of court by the absolute simplicity of God on the one hand, and by the Avicennian theory of universals on the other; his main problem concerned the meaning of the logical predicate affirmed of God. These predicates, not being universals, and of necessity identical with the divine essence, must consequently form tautological propositions. It is this avoidance of a tautology, I think, that Maimonides aims at in his negative interpretation of attributes. The divine predicates, he says, though expressing a relation of identity with the subject, are not tautological, for the affirmation of identity has an emphatic meaning, implying as it does the negation of diversity. 'God is existent' is, to be sure, equivalent to

³⁰ Cf. Gersonides' criticism of Maimonides in *Milhamot*, III, 3, which is quoted below in note 54.

the affirmation that 'God is God', but still even the latter proposition may be logically justified if it means to emphasize that 'God is not Man'. Similarly 'God is existent' emphasizes the negation of absentness. The justification of identity as a logical relation by means of its emphatic use, is found in the Logic of Alfarabi.³¹ Thus, the positive forms of predicates are not altogether useless according to Maimonides. And this is exactly what he means by saying that the divine predicates are homonymous terms. Not being universal, and expressing a relation of identity, divine predicates are absolutely unrelated with similarly sounding predicates describing other beings. In the following statements of Maimonides, 'God exists without existence, lives without life', &c., we clearly see that 'God is existent' does not merely mean that 'God is not absent', but what it means is that God is existent with an existence of His own, identical with His own essence. To affirm this is to emphasize the negation of existence used as a universal term.

If, as we have just said, by negative attributes Maimonides means that the divine predicates affirm a relation of identity, emphasizing the negation of a non-identical relation, it follows that the term *negative* must have been used by Maimonides in some special sense. By negative attributes he does not mean that the proposition in which a predicate is affirmed of God is negative in quality. He means that although the proposition itself is positive in quality, the predicate is to be understood to have a negative prefix.

³¹ 'In a proposition like the following, the predicate and subject can both be individual: "The one who is sitting is Reuben"' (Alfarabi, *Book on Syllogism*). הנשוא יכל להיות ג'כ אישי עם הנושא אישי במשפט הזה; זה. היושב הוא ראובן (אלפראבי בספר ההקדש p. 71 Brit. Mus. Harley 5523).

Thus, 'God is one' is not to be convertible into 'God is not many', but the term 'one' must be taken to mean 'not-many', the quality of the proposition as a whole remaining unaltered. In order fully to appreciate this distinction, let us briefly restate what Aristotle had said about the quality of propositions. There is, he points out, a distinction between a proposition wherein the negative particle modifies the copula, and that wherein it modifies the subject or the predicate. The former is a negative proposition, the latter is an affirmative proposition with an indefinite subject or predicate, as the case may be.³² A negative proposition expresses the privation of the subject of one of two alternative qualities, thus always implying its possession of the other; an affirmative proposition with an indefinite predicate expresses the exclusion of the subject of a certain class of qualities which are irrelevant to its nature. The latter kind of proposition is said to express what Kant would call an infinite or limiting judgement, as is to be distinguished from a negative judgement, as the proposition 'The soul is not-mortal' is to be distinguished in meaning from that of 'The soul is not mortal'.³³ It is in the sense of the Aristotelian indefinite predicate that Maimonides uses the expression 'negative attribute', the negative particle being hyphenated with the predicate, thus excluding the subject not only from the stated predicate, but also from implication of its antithesis. This seems to me to constitute the significance of the following passage: 'Even the negative attributes must not be found and applied to God, except in the way in which, as you know, sometimes an attribute is negated with reference to a thing, although that attribute

³² Cf. *Organon*, On Interpretation, ch. x, and *Metaphysics*, IV, 22.

³³ Cf. Sigwart's *Logic*, vol. I, ch. iv.

can naturally never be applied to it in the same sense ; as, e.g. we say, "The wall is not seeing" (Moreh, I, 58). It is quite evident that we never say 'the wall is not seeing', except in the sense of 'the wall is not-seeing'.³⁴

The rejection of positive essential attributes and the admission only of negatives, which is tantamount to a confession of our ignorance of the divine essence, gives rise to the question whether thereby it would be possible at all to mark any gradation in human knowledge of the divine being. But that one's comprehension of God is commensurable with one's intellectual and moral virtues is a postulate of both reason and tradition.³⁵ In answer to this difficulty, Maimonides maintains that knowledge arrived at by negation is as capable of increase as knowledge attained by determination. The negative interpretation of attributes, since it has been explained to express the affirmation of the relation of identity emphasizing the negation of irrelevant qualities, has a double meaning. While excluding God from knowable universal qualities, the attributes affirm of Him some unknowable qualities, peculiar to Himself, and identical with His essence. When we exclude God from

³⁴ That this is what has been meant by Maimonides is quite clear from his statement in his *Milot ha-Higayon*, which asserts that it cannot be said that 'The wall is blind'. ולא יתואר בשם ההעדר כי אם אשר מטבעו שימצא לו הקנין שהוא הנוכחי להעדר ההוא, כי אנחנו לא נאמר בבתל שהוא סכל ולא עור ולא אלם (מלות ההגיון, שער י"א). Narboni in his commentary on the *Moreh* calls this kind of negation, referred to here by Maimonides, 'general' or 'absolute' (המשלחת), a term which has been adopted by the modern commentators, as Munk, Kaufmann, and Friedländer, in explaining the text. כבר ידעת ממה שקראת ממלאכת ההגיון, כי השלילה שני מינים: האחת השלילה המיוחדת [כמו בלעם אינו רואה] השלילה שני מינים: האחת השלילה המיוחדת [כמו בלעם אינו רואה] Cf. *Metaphysics*, IV, 22.

³⁵ Cf. *Moreh*, I, 59.

the attribute of ordinary existence, for example, at the same time we affirm that He exists with an existence of His own. God, by virtue of His absolute perfection in every sense, has an infinite number of aspects in His essence ; and had we only the means of doing so, we should be able to express them all in human language. But on account of the unknowability of the divine essence, we can express none of its infinite aspects in positive terms ; we can only indirectly hint at them by negating of Him our own knowable perfections. Not only must our affirmations of divine infinite perfections be indirect, they must also be limited in number, since the knowable human perfections that are negated of Him are finite in number. This limitation on our part involves a serious difficulty. For in the conditional reality of the world we know there is always a line of demarcation between what is always already actually known and what is actually unknown but is knowable. In so far as we are cognizant of conditional reality we are able to distinguish God from the world, the absolute from the conditional. By negations, we exclude Him from the known quantity of perfections and indirectly affirm of Him a corresponding number of unknowable divine perfections. Beyond that boundary line, which marks off that which is known from that which is unknown in the knowable world, God and the world appear to us to merge together, and though we do not say so, since we are unable to negate it, we assume as it were that God possesses all the knowable qualities of the undiscovered part of reality. But this limitation which springs from our disability varies with each individual. The boundary line between the known and the unknown in the knowable world shifts backward and forward in accordance with one's own intellectual

attainments. To the more informed the known part of reality is greater than to the less informed. The former hence can directly deny more knowable human perfections of God, and indirectly affirm more unknowable divine perfections than the latter. Thus, while neither possesses positive knowledge of the divine essence, their indirect knowledge of God varies widely. Furthermore, the realm of the knowable has not yet been completely laid bare, and, consequently, as our knowledge of conditional existence has before it ample opportunity of growth and expansion, so our knowledge of absolute existence of God might gradually draw nearer to perfection. Thus by means of the quantitative distinction in the knowledge of conditional reality between different individuals, and by means of the multiplicability of that knowledge in each individual, Maimonides conceives the possibility of a rising scale in men's knowledge of the divine essence.³⁶

Maimonides' theory of attributes is typical rather than original. None before him, to be sure, had analysed the problem so minutely and comprehensively as he, but his constructive view does not differ from those of his predecessors. Negative and dynamic interpretations of divine attributes had been the common stock-in-trade of Arabic and Jewish philosophers ever since Philo.³⁷ As thus far noticed, Maimonides departs from the commonly accepted view solely by differentiating between actions and external relations and his disqualification of the latter. Again, with the exception of the naïve theologians, referred to by

³⁶ Cf. *ibid.* While I have given here a rather free interpretation of the chapter, I hope I have remained true to its spirit.

³⁷ Cf. Munk, *Guide*, I, ch. 58, p. 238, note 1, and Kaufmann's *Attributenlehre*, p. 481.

Maimonides himself, none of the rational thinkers admitted the propriety of accretive attributes. The discussion was focused mainly on the so-called essential attributes, that is, the universal predicates which enter into the formation of definitions. Thus the problem of attributes runs parallel to that of universals and to that of the nature of logical propositions. We have seen how all these problems converge in the theory of Maimonides. Taking universals to be present as something distinct within individuals, and finding the predication of such universals to be inconsistent with the absolute simplicity of God; believing that a logical proposition must affirm a real relation unless that affirmation is emphatic, he was forced to declare all divine predicates to be relations of identity emphasizing a negation. In his own language, the divine predicates are homonymous terms, having nothing in common with terms of the same sound. Following the same analysis of the problem, we shall now expound several other representative theories of attributes. Algazali's criticism of Avicenna will be taken as our starting-point, after which we shall discuss Averroes and two of his Jewish followers, Gersonides and Moses Halavi, and finally we shall give a rather full account of an entirely new view proposed by Crescas on this subject of divine attributes.

II

Algazali's approach to the solution of the problem is unique in its kind. He dares what nobody else before him had ever thought of doing, to impugn the Avicennean definition of necessary existence. Does necessary existence preclude noetic plurality? that is the main burden of his inquiry. His answer is in the negative. The primary

meaning of necessary existence, he contends, is the absence of efficient causation.³⁸ The Avicennean proof for the conception itself, indeed, merely establishes the fact of an ultimate terminus to the interlacing chain of cause and effect. That terminus is necessary in the sense that its springing into being had not been effected by the operation of a pre-existent agent. The phrase *necessary existence*, therefore, means nothing but primary existence, the term *necessary* signifying in this phrase a description of the spatial and temporal relation of a certain being in a series of causally interrelated entities rather than a qualitative determination of the nature of that being. If we are now asked, Can the necessarily existent be composite? the answer would depend upon the circumstance whether the composition in question would be subversive to the uncon-

³⁸ Cf. *Destruction of the Philosophers*, Disputation VII. 'The source of error and blunder in all this discussion is to be found in the expression "necessary existence". But to us the expression seems to be irrelevant, for we do not admit that the proof for necessary existence establishes anything except the existence of something eternal which had not been preceded by an efficient agent. If that is its meaning, the expression "necessary existence" must be dropped out of discussion. You must state your contention plainly, that it is impossible that there should be plurality and distinction in an eternal existence which had not been preceded by an efficient agent. But this you will be unable to prove.' ומקור השבוש וההמערדה בכל זה הוא מליצת מחוייב המציאות, ולכן לא תזכר ולא תפקד, כי אנתנו לא נודה שהראיה תודה על מחוייב המציאות אלא א"כ יהיה הנרצה בו קדמון שאין לו פועל, ואם היה זה הנרצה, תעוב נא מליצת מחוייב המציאות, ויאמר בפירוש שהוא מן השקר שימצא רבוי והכדל בנמצא קדמון שאין לו פועל, ודה אין לכם ראיה עליו (הפלת הפילוסופים, שאלה ז').

The same argument recurs in Disputations V, VI, VIII, IX, and X.

This seems to me to be the central argument made by Algazali. Curiously enough, De Boer, in his *Der Widerspruch der Philosophie nach al-Gazali*, does not even mention it. Neither is it mentioned in Carra de Vaux's *Gazali*, ch. II, where he discusses the latter's theory of attributes.

ditional existence of the being, unconditional in the sense that it is not grounded in an efficient cause. If the compositeness be not subversive to such unconditional being, then the necessarily existent may be composite. By means of the conception of necessary existence so stated, Algazali proceeds to show that the necessarily existent, according to Avicenna's own definition, might be composed of matter and form,³⁹ of substance and attribute;⁴⁰ it might also be defined in terms of genus and difference;⁴¹ and, finally, that it might also have existence superadded to its essence.⁴² Indeed, Algazali goes even farther. The original conception of necessary existence does not, he holds, preclude the duality of absolutely existent beings.⁴³ Unity, simplicity, and incorporeality are all unwarranted by necessary existence. It is only by vitiating the primary meaning of the term, by extending the proof for the absence of any efficient cause whatsoever, that necessary existence had come to be used by philosophers in the sense of absolute simplicity; and, again, it is by a kind of vicious intellectualism which reasons from the conception of absolute simplicity rather than from the conception of necessary existence, that the philosophers had erroneously inferred the necessity of the first unconditionally existent being as one, simple, undefinable, and unrelatable.

³⁹ Cf. Disputation IX: בלאותם מהעמיד ראייה על שהראשון אינו גשם.

⁴⁰ Cf. Disputation VI: בהסכימים על שקרות קיום המדע, והיכלת, והרצון, להתחלה ראשונה.

⁴¹ Cf. Disputation VII: אי"א שישתתף בבטול אמרם שמציאות הראשון אי"א שישתתף. עם זולתו בסוג ויובדל ממנו בהבדל.

⁴² Cf. Disputation VIII: בבטול אמרם שמציאות הראשון פשוט, כלומר, הוא מציאות גמור ואין מהות ולא אמתות יצורף המציאות עליהם.

⁴³ Cf. Disputation V: בבאור לאותם מהעמיד ראייה על שהאל אחד ושאי"א להניח שני מחויבי המציאות כל אחד אין עלה לו.

Algazali's argument against Avicenna's conception of necessary existence is based upon the latter's use of the term 'possibility'. Possibility, according to mediaeval Jewish and Arabic logicians, has two meanings. In the first place, it applies to a thing which without any cause whatsoever may by its own nature come or not come into being. This is the real and primary meaning of possibility. In the second place, the term applies to a thing which cannot come into existence save through an external cause, in the sense that in so far as the thing is dependent upon a cause, with respect to itself it is only possible, since its existence is determined by the presence or absence of that cause. This is the unreal and derivative meaning of possibility.⁴⁴ Real possibility is thus the antithesis of impossibility.

⁴⁴ Moses Halavi, in his Treatise 'On the First Mover', discussing Avicenna's proof for necessary existence, makes the following comment: 'The term possibility is not used here in the sense in which it is used in the Logic, namely, that which may or may not exist. But we must understand that the expression of having by itself only possible existence is another way of saying that it owes its existence to something else. Necessity and impossibility are not, therefore, its antitheses. For the existence which accrues to some external cause may sometimes be necessary and sometimes not. In both cases, however, we call it possible by itself, by which we mean that of whatever nature the existence in reality is, it is due to some external cause.' To this the Hebrew translator adds the following note: 'In general, he [i.e. Avicenna] does not mean by possibility that whose antithesis is necessity, but that whose antithesis is self-sufficiency.' "וזה שהוא לא נשא מלת האפשר בכאן על הבנתה במלאכת ההנחות, והוא אשר יתחייב לו אפשר שלא ימצא, אלא ידענו שאמרנו בכאן אפשר המציאות לעצמותו הוא מליצה מק[נין] המציאות מהוולת, וההכרח פה והעדרו בלתי נוכחיים, כי לפעמים יהיה המציאות הנקנה מהוולת הכרחי, ולפעמים לא יהיה כן. ונאמר בשני ענינים שהוא אפשר המציאות לעצמותו, רצוני, שמציאותו איזה דרך היה מדרכי המציאות נקנה מוולתו." המעתיק העברי הוסיף בכאן על הגליון: "ובכלל אין כוונתו כאן במלת אפשרי אשר מקבילו ההכרח, אלא אשר מקבילו ההסתפקות בעצמו".

lity and necessity; unreal possibility is the antithesis of self-sufficiency. Now, in his proof of the existence of God, Avicenna uses the term possibility in its unreal meaning.⁴⁵ From the observation that all existences, sublunary as well as translunary, are with respect to themselves only possible, on account of the presence of an external cause, he concludes that there must be a prime cause which is necessary even with respect to itself. In what sense, according to Avicenna, must that prime cause be necessary with respect to itself? Certainly in the same sense as that in which the other existences are possible, namely, with respect to external causation. Consequently his proof for the presence of a necessarily existent being merely establishes the self-sufficiency of that being; that is, its independence with respect to external causation, without, however, disproving its dependence upon internal causation. Hence, Algazali's criticism against Avicenna's identification of necessary existence with absolute simplicity.

That Algazali's criticism is incontrovertible is generally admitted. In his *Destruction of the Destruction* Averroes refutes Algazali's contentions not by justifying Avicenna, but by showing that Avicenna is misrepresenting the philo-

⁴⁵ Cf. Averroes' *Destruction of the Destruction*, Disputation X. 'It was Avicenna's intention to have his distinction between possibility and necessity correspond to the philosophers' view of existences, for according to all the philosophers the celestial spheres are said to be necessary with respect to their cause. But still we may ask whether that which is necessary with respect to its cause has really any possibility by itself.' ואמנם רצה בן סיני שיסכים בואת החלוקה [בגליון: ממחוייב ואפשר למה שיש לו עלה ולמה שאין לו עלה] אל דעת הפילוסופים בנמצאות; וזה שהגדרם השמימי אצל כל הפילוסופים הוא הכרחי בוולתו. ואמנם האם הוא הכרחי בוולתו יש בו אפשרות בצרף אל עצמן, בו עיון. ולזה היתה זאת הדרך מעוקשת כשילכו בה זה המהלך. Likewise in *Moreh ha-Moreh*, II, Prop. 12.

sophers in the use of the terms possibility and necessity.⁴⁶ Possibility, to Averroes, has only one meaning, and that is the real and primary one. Nothing whose existence is dependent upon external causes can, he holds, be called possible in any sense whatsoever. Avicenna's designation of sublunar and celestial elements as possible is, therefore, untenable; and his consequent proof for a self-existent cause is likewise invalid. The indivisibility of the divine essence as well as the unity of God does not follow indirectly from the proof of His necessary existence, but from the arguments, of which there are several, which directly prove His simplicity and unity.⁴⁷ And so, while disagreeing with Avicenna as to the proof, Averroes agrees with him that the divine attributes must be interpreted (1) as negatives, and (2) as external relations, the latter of which include

⁴⁶ Cf. *Destruction of the Destruction*, Disputation X. 'It has already been made clear from our arguments that if by necessary existence is understood that which has no cause, and by possible existence that which has a cause [i. e. the Avicennian view], the division of being into these two classes [i. e. necessary and possible] could not be asserted, for the opponent might deny this alleged division, maintaining that every existent being is without a cause. But if by absolute existence is meant necessary existence, and by possible is understood real possibility [i. e. the Averroean view], the series must undoubtedly terminate at an existence which has no cause.'

כבר קדם ממאמרנו שכאשר יובן מחוייב המציאות מה שאין עלה לו, יובן מאפשר המציאות מה שיש עלה לו, לא תהיה חלוקת הנמצא בשני אלה הפרקים ידוע בה, כאשר לבעל דין לחלוק שאינו כמו שזכר, אבל כל נמצא אין עלה לו; אכן כאשר יובן ממחוייב המציאות הנמצא ההכרחי וזמן האפשר, האפשר האמתי יכלה הענין בלא ספק אל נמצא אין עלה לו.

⁴⁷ Cf. *Averroes' Destruction of the Destruction*, Disputation VI. 'I say that this is a refutation of him who, like Avicenna, argues for the rejection of attributes from the premise of necessary existence by itself. But the best method to be followed in this inquiry is to argue from unity.' אמרתי זה כלו סתירה למי שהלך בהרחקת התארים דרך בן סיני, בהעמיד מחוייב המציאות בעצמותו; ואמנם הדרך היותר טובה בזה בחיוב ההתאחדות.

both the category of relation and that of action.⁴⁸ But these are not the only explanation of attributes. By a new theory of universals, which will presently be set forth, Averroes maintains that some attributes may be positive and essential.

Avicenna, as we have seen, holds the universals to have reality *in re* and *post rem* because of their reality *ante rem* in the mind of God. The pre-existent universals, according to him, are present in the multitudinous individuals. What then does Avicenna mean by his assertion that universals exist only in mind? He means by that that the presence of those universals in the individuals and our abstraction of them cannot be *discovered* except by the mind, though their presence in the individuals is independent of the mind. Averroes differs with him on that point. He thinks the very presence of the universals in the individuals a mere mental invention. The phrase that universals are in the mind he interprets to mean that the very presence of the universals in the individuals and their distinction therefrom is *invented* by the mind. The difference between Avicenna and Averroes is similar to the difference between the objective and subjective interpretations of Spinoza's definition of attribute in modern philosophy. Consequently in any definition the distinction between the individual substance which is defined and the universal substance by which it is defined has no reality whatsoever. The individual substance only appears to the mind in universal aspects. It is exactly this mentally invented distinction, says Averroes, that Aristotle conceives to exist between the faculties of the soul and its essence, and that also the Christian theologians conceive to exist between the three

⁴⁸ Cf. *Destruction of the Destruction*, Disputation V.

Personalities and the Godhead, though both the soul-essence and the Godhead are in reality one and absolutely indivisible.⁴⁹

By this Averroes could have solved the entire problem of attributes. He could have said that the predicates attributed to God all designate certain aspects in which the divine essence appears to the human mind. He does not,

⁴⁹ Cf. *ibid.* 'It is in the nature of essential attributes that they do not actually diversify their subject; they diversify it only in the same sense as the parts of a definition are said to diversify the object defined, that is, what is called by the philosophers a mental plurality in contradistinction to an actual plurality. Take, for instance, the definition of man as a rational animal, in which case neither of these attributes nor both of them are actually added to the individual human essence, though man is diversified by the attributes describing appearance and form. Hence, it will follow that he who admits that the existence of the soul is absolutely independent of matter, will also have to admit that among immaterial existences there are such that are one in actuality though many in definition [that is to say, the soul is one in essence but many in faculties]. This is also the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, that is, they do not believe in attributes adjoined to the essence, for the attributes to them are only in definition, the manifoldness of which are not in actuality but in potentiality. Hence, they claim that these [personalities] are three and yet one, i. e. one in actuality but three in potentiality.' מדרך התארים העצמיים שלא יתרבה במ הנושא הסובל להם, אבל אמנם יתרבה בצד אשר יתרבה המוגדר בחלקי הגדר, וזה שהוא רבוי שכלי אצלם, לא רבוי בפועל, ר"ל, ודמיון זה, שהאדם אדם חי מדבר, ואין הרבוי והחיות כל אחד מהם וכו' מחברו בו, ר"ל, בפועל. והמראה והתמונה מתרבה בו, ר"ל, ולזה יתחייב למי שיורה שהנפש אין מתנאי מציאותה החומר שיורה שכבר ימצא בנמצאות הנבדלות מה שהוא אחד בפועל, ר"ל, הרבה בגדר. וזהו דעת הנוצרים בשלש, וזה, שהם לא יראים תארים נוספים על העצם, ואמנם הם אצלם מתרבים בגדר, והם רבים בכח ולא בפועל, ולזה יאמרו שהם שלשה ואחד, כלומר, אחד בפועל שלשה בכח.

This passage is paraphrased by Narboni in his commentary on the *Moreh* (I, 58), but he disagrees with Averroes as to the latter's interpretation of the Trinity. The Trinity according to the Christian belief, he says, are not potential but actual. והנראה לי כי התארים הנ' בפועל אצל הנוצרים. והעצם אחד, לא שיהיה בכח כמו שיאמר ב"ר.

however, say so. He admits with Avicenna that all the attributes, which with regard to created beings are accidental, with regard to God must be interpreted either as negations or as dynamic and external relations.⁵⁰ There is one attribute, however, which he insists must be taken positively, and that is the attribute of Intelligence. Intelligence, says Averroes, is the essence of God. He maintains this to be the view of the Peripatetics in opposition to that of Plato.⁵¹ Intelligence is therefore merely another word for God. In the proposition, 'God is intelligent', the relation affirmed between subject and predicate is not real but formal. And likewise the universality of that term, which is implied in its application to God and to human beings, is only nominal and formal.

Still, the nominalist interpretation of a universal term disposes only of the assumption of an underlying identity running through various individuals. But it has to assume the existence of some kind of relation and resemblance between different things. Without such an assumption the mind could not form universal terms at all. What is then the relation that must be assumed to exist between God and other creatures in order to justify the common application of the term Intelligence? The relation, according to Averroes, is that of cause and effect. God is a thinking being in whom the subject, object, and process of thinking are all one and the same thing. But His thinking is creative, and all the Intelligences as well as the human intelligence are offshoots of the divine intelligence. The application, therefore, of the term intelligence to God and to human beings does not mean that both share alike in

⁵⁰ Cf. *Destruction of the Destruction*, Disputation V.

⁵¹ Cf. *ibid.*

a common property; it means that man derives his intelligence from God, in whom it is not a property but the very essence.

The universalization of an individual term by means of its application to the effects of that individual with which the term has originated is distinguished by Averroes as a class by itself. He designates such terms as ambiguous with respect to priority and posteriority of application. To get at the meaning of this phrase, we need enumerate all the other kinds of applicability of universal terms with which this new one is contrasted. Thus: single terms may be universally applied to different individuals in three ways—equivocally, univocally, and ambiguously.⁵² A term is used equivocally when it is applied to two or more things which share nothing in common, either in essential or in non-essential properties. Such a term is a perfect homonym, and its several applications in reality are perfectly unrelated, as, to use an old example, the word *grammatica*, meaning the art of grammar and a woman. A univocal term is one which is applied to two things that share in an essential quality, as, for instance, the term 'man' applied to individual human beings. A term is ambiguous when it is applied to different individuals which share only in non-essential properties, e.g. 'white snow' and 'white paper'. We may recall that in Maimonides' theory the divine attributes are used neither univocally nor ambiguously, God sharing with other beings neither in essential nor in non-essential qualities. In that theory the attributes must be taken in

⁵² Equivocal = משותפים or משתתפים; univocal = מוסבמים or מסכמים; ambiguous = מסופקים. Cf. Algazali's *Intentions*, I, *Logic*, I, 5 (כונות הגיות), (אופן א', חלוקה ה' מכות ההגיות). Cf. Aristotle's *᾽Ομώνυμα*, *Συνώνυμα*, *Παράωνυμα*, *Categories*, I.

an equivocal or homonymous sense. Divine intelligence, therefore, is absolutely unrelated with human intelligence, and is applied to God negatively. Now, Averroes proposes a new usage of a universal term in the case of its application to two things which share in a common quality only, in so far as one of them derives its quality from the other, to which it is essential. God, therefore, does not participate with man in intelligence, but God being intelligence, man derives his intelligence from Him. That special sense, in which a term may be applied to different things, was according to Averroes' testimony unknown to Avicenna.⁵³

⁵³ Cf. Averroes' *Destruction of the Destruction*, Disputation VII. 'Ait Averroes: Si intellexisti id, quod diximus antea eo, quod sunt hic aliquae, quae includuntur uno nomine, non inclusione rerum univocarum, nec inclusione rerum aequivocarum, sed inclusione rerum relatarum ad aliud, quae dicuntur secundum prius, et posterius, et qualis proprietates harum rerum ut deveniant ad primum in illo genere, quod est causa prima omnibus, quibus imponitur hoc nomen, ut est nomen calidi, quod dicitur de igne, et aliis rebus calidis, et sicut est nomen entis, quod dicitur de substantia, et aliis accidentibus, et sicut nomen motus, quod dicitur de locali, et aliis motibus, non deficiet scire inane, quod ingreditur in hoc sermone, nam nomen intellectus dicitur de intellectibus separatis apud philosophos secundum prius et posterius, quorum est intellectus primus, qui est causa aliorum, et sic est in substantia. Et ratio, quae demonstrat quod non habent naturam communem, est quoniam aliquis eorum est causa alterius, et id, quod est causa rei, est prius causati, et impossibile est ut sit natura causae, et causati uno genere, nisi in causis individualibus, et haec quidem species communicationis est contradicens communicationi genericae vero, quoniam communia genere, non est in eis primum, quod est causa aliorum, sed omnia sunt in gradu, et non reperitur in eis aliquid simplex, sed communia in re, quae dicuntur secundum prius, et posterius, necesse est ut sit in eis primum, et simplex, et hoc primum impossibile est ut imaginetur ei secundatio. Nam quotienscunque ponatur ei secundum, necesse est ut sit in gradu eius, quo ad esse, et naturam: et erit ibi natura communis eis, qua communicat communicatione generis veri; et necesse est ut differant differentiis additis generi: ergo erit unumquodque; eorum compositum ex genere, et differentia, et omne quod huiusmodi est innovatum. Demum id, quod est in ultimitate perfectionis in esse, necesse est ut sit unum. Nam, nisi esset unum, im-

The new distinction in the universalization of terms which had been advanced by Averroes was adopted by Gersonides in his theory of divine attributes. Gersonides' constructive view may be gathered from his refutation of Maimonides. He commences by pointing out an inherent fallacy in the homonymous interpretation of positive attributes. Since all positive attributes that are not actions must be taken as homonyms, that is to say, affirming, according to the interpretation given above, a relation of perfect identity which emphasizes the negation of non-identity; and since consequently any predicate could thus be interpreted homonymously, what would account for the fact that some attributes are found in positive form whereas others occur only in negative form? Why should not the latter as well as the former be expressed in positive language? Take, for instance, the attributes of existence and incorporeality. If the former is perfectly homonymous, why should we not likewise affirm of God corporeality in an homonymous sense? To say that the sound of the word corporeality in itself, irrespective of its special meaning, is derogatory to the divine being, does not explain the matter. In dealing with the problem of attributes, we

possibile est ut sit ei ultimitas esse, id enim, quod est ultimitate non communicat ei aliud, nam, sicut linea una non habet ex uno latere duos fines, sic res, quae succedunt in esse, diversae quidem in additione, et diminutione, non habent duos fines ex uno latere. Avicenna autem nescivit in esse hanc naturam mediam inter naturam, quam significat nomen univocum et naturas, quae non communicant nisi nominibus tantum, aut accidenti remoto, et evenit ei haec dubitatio.' (Latin translation from the Hebrew of Averroes' *Hapalath ha-Hapalah*, in the tenth volume of Aristotle's collected works, p. 232 a-b, Venice, 1560.)

It should be observed that this special kind of generic terms, which, according to Averroes, was unknown to Avicenna, is mentioned by Algazali in his *Intentions*, I; Logic, I, 5: נאותים . . . והוא קיים בקרימה ואיחור, וכבר יקרא זה מסופק לחזרתו (כנות, הגיון, אופן א', חלוקה ה').

are chiefly concerned with the meaning of the terms as they are employed, and not with their associative connotations. Furthermore, the admissibility of attributes is decided upon the ground of their logical consonance with the conception of necessary existence, and not upon the consideration whether in human analogies they are regarded as perfections or imperfections. If the distinction of affirmative and negative prevails in the form of attributes, it follows that for quite different reasons the term existence, even when taken in a sense not entirely unrelated with its ordinary usage, may be affirmed of God, whereas the term corporeality under the same circumstances must not be affirmed of Him.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Cf. Gersonides' *Milhamot*, III, 3. 'In general, if the things which we predicate of Him were applied to God and to ourselves in perfect homonymy, none of the terms which we use in designating ordinary things would be more appropriately used in reference to God as negation rather than affirmations or as affirmations rather than negations. Thus, for instance, one would be able to state that God is corporeal, provided he did not mean by that corporeality anything possessing quantity, but something which is perfectly homonymous with what we usually call corporeality. Likewise, one would be able to state that God is unknowing, if the term knowing in that proposition was not used to designate the same thing as that which we ordinarily call knowledge. Nor can it be maintained that we negate of God corporeality because with respect to ourselves it is an imperfection, but we affirm of Him knowledge because it is a perfection. For it is not the term corporeality, which is alone negated of God, that is an imperfection; the imperfection is rather contained in its meaning. That this is so can be proved by the fact that were we to designate by the term corporeality what is now designated by the term knowledge, and by the term knowledge what is now designated by the term corporeality, then corporeality would have been in respect to ourselves, perfection and knowledge would have been an imperfection. Furthermore, we do not affirm nor negate anything of God unless we had first ascertained as to whether the existence of that thing is appropriate of God or not, but it is not imperative upon us to inquire as to whether that thing is a perfection or an imperfection with respect to ourselves.'

Thus divine attributes are to be taken, according to Gersonides, as universal terms. But now the two objections raised by Maimonides recur. First, the attributes being universals, according to the accepted theory of universals, exist as parts in the objective individuals; this, however, is impossible in the case of God. Secondly, by attributing universals, you imply some kind of relation between God and created beings, and *ipso facto* you imply a similarity between them, and such a similarity is impossible.

Gersonides' answer to these two possible objections, as we have said, betrays the unmistakable influence of Averroes. He distinguishes between a real, or rather existential, universal and a nominal, the latter being found in the case where an individual quality of a cause, which is identical with the essence of that cause, is in common language applied to the effects of that cause. That term, with respect to the object with whose essence it is identical, is only an invented universal. When joined in a proposition, the relation between the subject and predicate is, therefore, not real but verbal. A subject of that kind, says Gersonides, may be called a 'subject of discourse', for in reality the subject and predicate are identical. It is only when the predicate is an accident that its relation with the subject is real, the latter being called a 'subject of existence', that is to say, the subject of inhesion of the accidental predicate. Now, in God all the attributes are identical with His essence, or, in other words, they have no separate existence whatsoever. In any proposition, therefore, in which we predicate some attributes of God we really state a relation of identity. Still, such statements are not tautological. For logical propositions do not merely express *real* relations, but *formal* relations also. God is the 'subject of discourse' of the

attributes predicated of Him, and in discourse there is no tautology, for in discourse all the attributes predicated of God are universal terms. 'Knowledge', 'power', 'will', and all the other attributes, are affirmed of God and other beings in a related sense, the relation being that of cause and effect. But there is the following radical distinction between divine and human attributes. In God attributes are identical with His essence; in man they are accidental to it. In the technical language of the time this notion may be expressed as follows: The divine predicates are to be understood in a sense neither 'equivocal' nor 'univocal'; they are used in an 'ambiguous' sense with reference to the distinction of 'priority and posteriority'. To quote now Gersonides' own words:

'We say that after due reflection it appears that there are attributes that are applicable primarily to God and subsequently to other things besides Him without, however, implying plurality in God. For not every proposition in which something is affirmed of something implies plurality of that thing. There is implication of plurality only when one part of the proposition is the subject with respect to *existence* of the other part. But if it is not its subject with respect to existence, though it is its subject in the proposition, it does not follow that the subject is composite. For instance, if we state about a definite redness that it is a red colour, it does not follow that the redness is composed of colour and red, for colour is not the existent subject of red, but its subject of *discourse* only.'⁵⁵

But would not a nominal universal which is derived from two individuals correlated as cause and effect, imply the existence of some real relation and similarity between the two individuals? Gersonides endeavours to show that it would not. If any relation is to be implied it will be

⁵⁵ Cf. *Milhamot*, III, 3.

nominal, just as the universal itself is nominal. He cites an analogous case from the meaning of existence. Existence, according to Averroes, whose view is followed by Gersonides, is identical with the essence of the subject of which it is affirmed. Now, accidents exist through substances, the latter thus being the causes of the former. The term existence, therefore, is with respect to substances and accidents, a nominal universal implied to individuals which are causatively related. And yet there is no implication of the existence of any real relation between substance and accident. To quote Gersonides again :

‘It can be shown, even though we admit that there can be no relation between God and His creatures, that the attributes predicated of God may be applied to Him primarily and to other beings subsequently. For there are some terms which, though they are applied to some things primarily and to others subsequently, do not imply a relation between those things. For instance, the term existence is applied to substance primarily and to accident subsequently as stated in the *Metaphysics*. Still it is clear that there is no relation between substance and accidents.’⁵⁶

We turn now to the theory of divine attributes formulated by Moses Halavi.⁵⁷ Unlike Gersonides, Moses Halavi works out his theory independently of Maimonides, to whom he does not make the slightest allusion. His theory may be summarized as follows: Attributes are either positive or negative. Of the negative, some are so both in form (בשם) and in content (בענין), as, for instance, ‘incorporeality’. Others are negative only in content and positive in form, as, for instance, ‘eternity’, the real meaning of which is ‘without beginning or end’. Both of these kinds of attri-

⁵⁶ Cf. *ibid.*

⁵⁷ Cf. Steinschneider, *Uebersetzungen*, § 239.

butes are admissible. Thus far he is in perfect agreement with Maimonides.

Positive attributes are next divided by the author into three classes. First, attributes which are identical with the essence of the subject, as, for instance, animality in the predication of man. Second, attributes adjoined to the essence, as, for instance, whiteness, &c. Third, attributes which are merely descriptive of some external relation of the subject, as, for instance, actions and the relations of time and space. Of these three classes, the first and the last are admissible, but the second is inadmissible, for, adds the author, not only is any composition within the divine essence unthinkable, but likewise the composition of His essence with something outside itself.⁵⁸

The points of difference between this theory and that of Maimonides are worth attention. First, according to Maimonides, actions and external relations are two different classes of attributes, the one admissible, the other inadmis-

ואמנם התארים החיוביים, שם וענין, מהם תארים הם מהות המתואר.⁵⁸ בתארנו אדם כשהוא חי: ומהם תארים אינם הם חלק מהות אלא יוצאים ממנו, ואבל הם יורו על תכונה במתואר מחוברת למהות, בתארנו גדי שהוא לבן; ומהם תארים אינם מהות המתואר ולא הם תכונה מחוברת למהות, ואבל הם הלצות למתואר בצרוף אל דבר יוצא ממנו, בתארנו גדי כשהוא לימין דן, ואלה יקראו התארים הצרופיים. אמנם התארים אשר הם חלק המהות אינם מיוחסים לו ית', אחר שכבר התבאר שעצמותו ית' בלתי מתחלקת. ואמנם התארים אשר הם במהות המתואר, הנה מן הידוע שתאר אותו ית' בהם אפשר, אחר שלא יורו על ענין נוסף על המהות כלל... ומפני שתארי ית' באלו התארים הצרופיים נכון, אנחנו מתארים אותו בסביית, ובהתחליית... כי אלה כלם תארים צרופיים... הנה התבאר שהוא ית' נכון לתארו בתארים השוללים, וזה אם במלות וענין, ואם בענין בלתי מלות, ושתארי החיובים אשר בעצמותו ואשר הם על דרך הצרוף עובר

sible; according to Moses Halavi both fall under the heading of external relations and both are admissible.⁵⁹ Halavi, again, in contradistinction to Maimonides, calls essential universal attributes identical with the individual essence, and admits the usage in divine predications. This unmistakably proves that to him universals are merely mental inventions.

Reverting, then, to his first class of positive attributes, to those designating a universal essential quality, which he holds to be identical with the essence of the individual subject, like Gersonides, Moses Halavi endeavours to obviate the possible objection based on the proposition that identity cannot be a relation in a logical proposition. 'In answer to such an objection', he says, 'we maintain that the predicate of a proposition, as, for example, "He is knowing", with respect to its general meaning of the comprehension of external objects, is not identical with the subject. Nay, they are radically different terms, for the term "knowing" does not imply the specific subject of the proposition. It is with respect to this general meaning that the predicate bears a real and unidentical relation to the subject. Sometimes, however, it may be warranted by the context of the proposition, that the apprehension implied in the predicate with regard to the subject should be taken in a specific sense which is identical with the subject, as, for example, in the proposition, "God is knowing". It is in accordance with this distinction between the two aspects of the predicate that we are enabled to attribute to God essential qualities which are distinct from Him as subject

⁵⁹ ומפני שתארי ית' באלו התארים הצרופיים נכון, אנחנו מתארים אותו בסביית, ובהתחלית, ובבריאה, ובעשיית, וזולת זה מה שדומה לו, כי אלה כלם תארים צרופיים, כי ענינם שמציאות זולתו נשפעת ממציאותו.

and predicate, but do not imply plurality in His essence.'⁶⁰

The implication of this passage is clear. Essential attributes are universalized by the mind. They are mere aspects of the individual objects in which they have neither objective nor subjective existence. But it is that mentally invented universal aspect of the individual subject that is affirmed in a logical proposition. The relation between subject and predicate is, therefore, merely formal, and God, though identical with His attributes, can still be their formal subject in a proposition.

In these five theories of divine attributes, which we have analysed, the points of agreement and disagreement are clear. They all agree that Biblical predications of God should be taken as logical judgements. All but Algazali accept the Avicennean definition of the absolute simplicity of the divine essence, though they do so for different reasons. The controversy turns merely on the reality of the universal predicates and their distinction from the

וכבר יקשה המקשה, הנה תאמר שכל גזרה יהוייב שגשואה ונושאה⁶⁰ יהיו משתנים עם היות אחד מהם נושא לאחר. ואמנם כשהיה נשואה ונושאה דבר אחד בעינינו, הנה אין שם נושא ונשוא באמת, אבל יהיה מובן המאמר אשר בזה לא יגיע ממנו תועלת בין שהולץ מאותו הענין בשם אחד כמו שאמרנו שהאדם אדם, או בשני שמות נרדפים, באמרנו שהחמור עיר, כי זה [דומה] לאמרנו שהחמור חמור. . . . והתשובה על זאת הקושיא, שגשואה זאת הגזרה, והוא אמרנו יודע בבחינה הוראתה על ענין היריעה משולח אינו נרדף לנושאה, אבל הם שני שמות נבדלים, כי אמרנו יודע לו מובן בלתי בלתי מובן נושא הגזרה, ומה הצד לוקח אחד מהם נושא והאחר נושא. אכן קרה ליריעה בצדוק אל זה העצמות המתואר בה שהיו דבר אחד בעינו במציאות, וזה דבר יוצא ממוכן הגזרה, והוא אמרנו שהאל יודע, הנה על דרך הזה יתאמת שיתואר ית' בתארים אשר הם עצמותו, ויתחייב מזה הנושא והנשוא, מבלתי שיתחייב הרכבה בעצמות.

subject. And on this point, too, they all further agree that in God the universal cannot in any way be distinct from His individuality. The inquiry is, therefore, reduced to the following two questions: First, are the universal essential attributes in beings other than God distinct from their individual essence or not? Second, in what sense are these universals applied to God as predicates? The answer to the latter questions is dependent upon that given to the former. Maimonides, believing that in other beings the universals are distinct from the individual essences, is forced to interpret the divine predicates as homonymous, that is to say, as absolutely individual terms, entirely unrelated with other terms of the same sound. Averroes, however, believing that all essential universals are mere names, interprets the predicate of intelligence in its application to God as a universal term used ambiguously *secundum prius et posterius*. Gersonides and Halavi follow Averroes, but extend his interpretation of the predicate Intelligence to all other predicates. With this, we are ready for our discussion of Crescas.

(To be continued.)